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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Food Distribution Administration

THE HOTEL MAN'S PART IN THE WAR FOOD PROGRAM

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An address by J. S. Russell, Deputy Director, Food Distribution Administration before the Annual Dinner of the Hotel Association of New York City, New York City, January 28, 1943.

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We in America have always done things in a big way. We've built the greatest mass production industries--the fastest automobiles and the tallest skyscrapers. The list of things on the positive side would be long. The same can be said on the negative. We've lavished our resources, squandered our timber and created our dust bowls. In the matter of food, the amount that we've wasted every year would probably feed the population of at least one country in Europe.

Now in the matter of food we've come to a day of reckoning. Our sentence isn't going to be starvation, or even going hungry. But certainly we're going to go without many things and get less of many more. Let's look this food shortage situation in the face. What do we find? We find that we are in for plenty of inconvenience, discomfort, and sacrifice. The situation is going to get worse and stay worse for a long time, before it gets better.

Don't get me wrong--we're not going to be punished for the food we've been wasting. We're just going to have to pay the price of the wasteful habits that we've developed. We're going to have to unlearn a lot of those old habits, and develop some new ones. The process isn't going to be at all pleasant.

This is not to take a defeatist or alarmist attitude. I am just facing facts and asking you to face them with me. As I know the American people they have never been afraid to face the facts.

The facts that we are going to look at today are not in the category of military secrets. They're not going to give any aid and comfort to the enemy--but they're not going to give much comfort to any of the rest of us, either.

We just plainly don't have enough food to meet all of our demands. There's no use fooling ourselves that we can send to the fighting front the amount of food needed there, and still satisfy everybody on the home front with as much as he wants and can afford to buy. It's always been our boast that we were the best fed nation in the world. We still may be able to make that same boast in the future--but it will be only because the pinch is tighter in other lands--and not because there's no pinch here.

It's an easy kind of patriotism that can play the band and wave the flag when the boys march off to the front. But it takes a tougher fibered love of country than that to win wars. It takes the kind of love of country that not only talks about equality of sacrifice, but which translates it into action, with the same willingness on the home front that we see on the field of battle.

The time has come in this game of equal sacrifice for the home front, to turn the cards face up and see who's holding aces and who's playing a four flush. That's going to apply to individuals and to whole industries--and we're counting on the hotels and all the rest of the public catering industry to come through with aces.

One instance in which you're going to have to come through is in this matter of materials. This is a little off the food track, but it's something you're interested in. The Food Distribution Administration will have some part in the control of materials for use in the various branches of the food industry. Right now, let me say don't expect anything in the way of materials for new construction. The only possible exceptions will be isolated cases in defense centers where additional facilities are needed. There aren't going to be any more new dining rooms or new cocktail lounges. If you've been planning on any, just forget about them. If that sounds unreasonable, just remember that we can't use the same materials for two things at the same time. Today, and as far as we can see ahead, first things, like guns, and planes, and ships, and arsenals, are going to come first.

But the material situation isn't so bad. You'll at least have what you've got--as much as you had in the past. Food is another story. You're not going to have as much as you had in the past--not nearly so much.

In normal times food is just another commodity that the hotel industry, and the rest of the public caterers, sell in combination with service. Food is just another item of trade. It's something that you can sell and make a profit on. If you waste a little, it just means a little lower profit for the week. Nobody is hurt.

But now the picture is changed. Food is far from just another commodity to be bought and sold at a profit. It's ammunition, and when you're in a hard fight, you don't pour your powder down the drain or toss it out in the garbage pail. We can't win this war with blank cartridges.

Naturally the hotel man wants to know, and has a right to find out, why we're experiencing a food shortage when our farm production for the past 2 years has been at record levels, and when for most of the past decade we worried about the surplus of farm products.

You can supply part of the answer from your own business experience. You know that the sales volume of all goods and services is influenced by the amount of money people have to spend. With the great increase in purchasing power in the last 2 years the demand for food has gone up.

Let's not get the wrong idea, though, and come to a hasty conclusion that our population is running riot in the pantry or headed for a case of stomach ulcers from overeating. We all recognize that during the long depression years a lot of people couldn't afford to eat properly. Now many of them can. Even more important is the fact that our population needs more food because all of us are working harder. The number of persons gainfully employed is greater than ever before in our history--and work takes energy and energy takes food. It's pretty easy to figure out that when you're busy in a shipyard or steel mill or on any other job, you're going to need more groceries

than when you're sitting around an employment office waiting for something to turn up.

Then there's the expansion of the armed forces to take into account. The soldier, because of his harder job, needs more food than the average civilian--and he's getting more food than the average civilian--to the tune of about half a ton a year. Multiply the number of men in the armed forces by half a ton and you got a big addition to our national food requirements.

As part of our war program we have been sending food abroad to our fighting allies. Without wanting to detract from the credit due to the British for their gallant accomplishments in this war--and we know the enormous sacrifices that these people have made--we can take pride in the fact that the small quantities of some foods we have been sharing with our comrades in arms, have helped to stop Hitler in the skies over Britain and on the plains of Russia. An American grocery wagon may not be the best means of transportation to Berlin, but if what happened in the sky over London or at the gateway to Stalingrad is any indication, that wagon is one sure way of getting there and all of us ought to be glad for the opportunity to keep it rolling. For every pound of butter we've been sending to Russia we've been getting paid off with dead Nazis--and on a poundage basis the rate of exchange is very favorable.

All of these demand pressures added together have more than counterbalanced the increased production that our farmers have been turning out. Naturally, shortages in some commodities have arisen.

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I would be less than candid if I didn't remind you that these shortages are the normal situation in wartime. You can look for them and prepare for them, and adjust your business so that you can operate under them. If you can't make the adjustment you're not going to be around very long.

A good many of you probably went through the situation in the last war. You know that these shortages are something we have to take in our stride as part of waging war. But what you saw in the last war was the preliminary bout and now you'll see the main event. So you can expect shortages of practically everything, and then if we have an abundant supply of some things--we'll just be that much better off.

To assure equitable distribution of available supplies of those commodities in short supply, the Federal Government has set up rationing procedures. You are already familiar with sugar rationing and with coffee rationing. It has been announced, also, that we are soon to have rationing of canned fruits and vegetables and of meats. Others will be added to the list of food products under ration control as time goes on.

These various programs will have a direct bearing on the food end of the hotel industry, as well as other branches of the public catering industry.

Taking the public catering industry as a whole for a moment, we know that it is a very important cog in our wartime food machine. More than 20 percent of our people normally eat in public establishments. Those figures translated another way mean that the average person eats more than one meal out of five in a hotel dining room, restaurant, cafeteria, or other public

establishment.

Those figures in themselves are enough to point out the important place the industry has in the wartime food program.

Under the rationing program so far set up, customers eating in public establishments are not required to surrender ration coupons for the food they consume--coffee and sugar to date--and the same will apply to canned goods and meat when the time comes. But that does not mean that the public feeding industry is to become an instrument whereby the ends to be served by the rationing program may be nullified. We know that the industry doesn't want to be forced into any such role by the minority of chiselers who don't want to go along with the wartime food program.

It is proposed, to insure the equitable distribution of available foods among the various public catering establishments, that the flow of foods into them be limited. Let's say for example that you get 30 percent less, as far as the shortage items are concerned, than you got in the past, and that the same ratio applies throughout the industry.

That is one way of controlling the distribution of food in an equitable manner among the various competing establishments. Something along that line will be worked out. But a sound program cannot end there. It has to take into account the competitive situation, and also the relationship between the cateror and his customers.

In other words we have to look at this problem in terms of a relationship between government and industry--but we also have to look beyond to the general public. Remember those figures of a moment ago--more than 20 percent of the people look to the public catering industry for their daily food. With that situation in existence the Federal Government wants its program to contribute to conservation and still make it possible for the industry to serve the more than 20 percent of the population who depend on it for food.

You can do your own arithmetic on this. With the flow of food into your establishment reduced, and the same number of persons dependent on you for their meals, it adds up to the fact that you're going to have to make what you get go further. You're going to have to do the same job with less than you formerly did with more. Because of the competitive situation, the only way this thing is going to work out fairly to all concerned, is by its application on an industry-wide basis. It's not going to take any argument or explanation on my part for you to see the necessity for that. Just picture what would happen if you went along with the program and your competitor down the street didn't.

Now, how are you going to do the job of feeding the people who look to you to be fed and do it with less food than you formerly had. Many of you have already had a lot of experience with that problem. There are a good many items that you haven't been able to get in the quantity you could use if it were available. Butter, bacon, and beef are some of the foods that may not have been available. If you were compiling the list there are probably some other items that you would want to add.

So far I haven't heard of any hotel man who had to close his doors because he couldn't get food--and I think that's some testimonial to the ingenuity of your stewards and chefs rather than a denial of the tightness of the supply situation. You've probably had to do some fast footwork on menu changes, and in meal planning to take advantage of the things that were available, leaving out those that weren't. You've probably had to develop new dishes, as substitutes or alternates, or whatever you choose to call them, for the customary items. In some cases you've had to cut down on the size of portions, such as elimination of the second cup of coffee and the extra lump of sugar, or the thickness of the steak or the slices of roast beef.

It's a good thing that you've already had this experience of dealing with these shortage situations in the past. It'll be good education in dealing with the situation that lies ahead. Let's be frank about it and admit that the education you've had so far has been in the elementary class and now you're getting ready to enter college.

You'll find when you get to college that the subjects are somewhat the same as in elementary school but that the assignments are harder. We'll do all that we can to see that nobody flunks out but there aren't going to be any football players who get by just to please the alumni.

Reduction in the size of portions--yes, that's one of the things that's going to have to be done. By and large that's something that you'll work out for yourselves in connection with shortage items. You'll probably do it on the basis of the amount available in relation to the number of patrons you have to feed with it. On some things the limitation may be more definite. In Canada the order governing public eating establishments limits the amount of butter, for example, to one pat containing one-third of an ounce to each customer. In the case of butter, we in the United States may borrow from the Canadian plan.

On the number of courses there will have to be some limitation, too. Remember that the Federal Government is very much interested in this matter of nutrition. A national program is being carried out to help inform people on dietary matters, on the matters of vitamins, minerals, and calories, on the need for balanced meals. So it's in line with good nutritional practice to see that the courses are sufficient in number to make possible a well-balanced meal and small enough in number to contribute to the conservation of food.

You men know, and well know, from your day-to-day experience that some of the courses that are put on the table are never eaten--at best they are toyed with. They find their way to the garbage pail. They add to your expense and contribute little if anything to the satisfaction of the patron. You know, too, if you are sensitive to public opinion, that lavish meals for some don't help to maintain good morale, when a lot of others are going on short rations.

But a program to conserve food for the purpose of stemming or warding off potential public resentment would be negative at best. We are in a situation where we have to approach a problem on positive grounds.

We need every bit of food that we can produce and distribute. On many products we need more than we can hope to get produced and processed.

We just don't have enough and in view of that situation we don't have a single ounce to waste. Food is ammunition in this war and there's still plenty of shooting to be done.

Not only are you going to have to conserve food right down to the table where it is served, but you've got the job of making us who are your patrons take it and like it. We're not going to get the kind of food supply management we need in wartime without public cooperation. You hotel men can see that you're going to need public cooperation to make this thing work out in your own establishments, and the same applies throughout the public catering industry. You've done a pretty good job on that second cup of coffee, without too much cussing of the government. This food situation is far too serious to be passed off with a brickbat at some public official who's trying to do a job that he didn't relish in the first place but that he knows has to be done. When we recall that our boys reported from Bataan that lack of food proved their undoing, we all can appreciate that what the Government is trying to do in the way of conservation can't just be passed off as another noble experiment.

Most of the American people, the overwhelming majority, will accept whatever sacrifices have to be made on the food front, as well as on any other front. All that our people want to know is the reason why it's essential. Part of your job in the public catering industry is to see that they get the story. Any industry, which like your own is able to sell itself so well that one out of every five meals served is eaten in a public establishment, can't learn a thing from whatever might have to say on how to go about a selling job.

The public catering industry has long been trying to hold down waste. It's a first rule they say, that in a public eating establishment you have to watch the garbage pail if you want to make a profit. That's all well and good and nobody will dispute your right to make a profit--but now take a second look at that garbage pail and this whole waste situation--and look for the sake of the war effort.

The food that you save and put to good use will be translated into guns and planes and ships and tanks--all of those jobs take energy--energy that has to be supplied with food.

They tell me that there are, at least used to be, some pretty good hotels and restaurants in other parts of the world where food shortage was a normal thing at all times and not just in time of war. If they could operate in spite of shortages, we can do it, and probably do it better. But to do it better there's still a lot we have to learn. I'm not proposing that we switch over to substituting potato parings for hashed browns or french fries. But I am proposing that a good many items of food that we normally don't even think about except in terms of the garbage pail are both palatable and nutritious when properly prepared.

We know that there are garbage pails on the doorstep of the home as well as on the doorstep of the hotel and restaurant and we're making the same appeal for food conservation to the housewives that we are to you.

There's more to conservation than prevention of waste or going without. The term means intelligent utilization as much as anything else. You are already doing a lot in the development of new dishes to take advantage of the supply situation, and there's still more that can be done. Of course, you're not going to be able to serve spaghetti every night to take the pressure off meat. And when you promote the use of cereal products by featuring hot cakes on the breakfast menu, you run square up against the butter shortage. But in many lines you can ease the pressure on processed items by using fresh items. This is particularly true in the case of fruits and vegetables.

The use of some of these fresh items will mean some extra work and we are well aware of what you are facing in the matter of manpower. But at the same time remember we can't send fresh spinach to North Africa, or to the Solomon Islands, while we can use it at home.

We had hotels and restaurants and other eating establishments long before the invention of the can opener and we'll continue to have them while the can opener is on the shelf.

One of our jobs in the Food Distribution Administration will be to work with you in the hotel industry toward the common objective that we have in wartime--the job of making the most of what we have. The better we do this thing the shorter the job will be. Now and then we may have to call the plays--but it will be up to you to carry the ball and carry it over the Axis goal line.

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